

Hello! You have probably seen me just about everywhere in Menton already – particularly at the moment! I haven't been able to introduce myself yet. My name is John Lemon. Yes– I know what you are thinking, I look nothing like him! The Lemons are one of the oldest and largest families in Menton. I have uncles, aunts and cousins in all the districts in the town. It is a very nice place to live. The climate is warm and humid, and the winters are exceptionally mild, thanks to all the mountains which provide protection from cold winds. As for the soil... it is such a delight! I am a little biased, it's true – just like everyone from Menton! Don't you think so?

Where do I come from? I know that my family were established on the Ligurian


John Lemon

tells the story of the Menton Lemon

coast in the 14th century. Some of my ancestors then came to live in Menton, attracted by the prospect of a promising future. It's true that the oranges were not so pleased to see us arrive. They soon realised that the town would belong to us. No quarter was given. Today, Menton is the town of the lemon. I've some written evidence which supports this fact. In 1807, a doctor wrote, 'The lemon tree is

one of this lucky climate's greatest assets. There is nowhere else on the Provence coastline where it grows in such great abundance'. And another specialist wrote in a book published in 1849, 'The lemon trees, which fruit so heavily in the Menton valley, can only be seen in Hyères and Nice growing as single individual trees in the middle of fields, where they fruit very little, or not at all'.

So, the people of Menton very quickly adopted my ancestors. A deed, dated 20 April 1471, mentions land where they were living happily and were prospering. In 1495, some members of my family were sent by Jérôme Grimaldi (a member of that great Monaco family, who would go on to become rulers in the 17th century) to the Duke of Orléans. To be ho-



nest, the text at the time talks only of 'orange apples', but there is a good chance that some Lemons were part of the delegation.

The Lemons reached their golden era in the 17th century. The family increased in size considerably, became very rich and, in their generosity, passed the benefit on to the people of Menton. The Princes of Monaco established a legal framework for its expansion and imposed standards of aesthetic excellence. The Lemons were forced to allow the use of gauges to measure and classify their circumferences. You couldn't just look however you wanted – the Menton lemon had to be shown at its best.

There was much to be proud about. Thanks to the Lemon family, the town of Menton and the Principality of Monaco had become rich. They created a lot of jobs, sometimes employing foreigners such as the Genoese who were attracted by the work, and created a livelihood for many bourgeois and farming families, as well as for traders and sailors. Thanks to us, many off-shoot activities were created, for example cooperage, cabinetmaking, distilling, etc.

Every traveller talked about the beauty which we had brought to the countryside around Menton. Oh! Just imagine the delight experienced by these travellers as they strolled through the citrus groves

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and drank in the aroma of thousands of flowering Lemons. There is an author, who I like very much, called Stéphen Liégard. He wrote in 1887, 'Breezes in the little valleys shower passers-by with the heady fragrance of the lemon trees'. It's the stuff dreams are made from, isn't it?

And it was a dream for the Lemons too. They were growing in open-air gardens, that were often quite small. It was nothing like the overpopulation of large cultivated areas seen in other parts of the world! There were regulations stipulating how the Lemons should be looked after at harvest time, 'The sun must be up, the weather calm and dry, the fruit must be collected in baskets lined with canvas or placed on the ground on a bed of canvas'. And then there were those women, the 'limoneuses', who carried the fruit in large baskets on their heads, walking with a firm tread and arched backs along the steep, rocky paths.

The Lemons were wrapped in tissue paper before they started off on long

journeys across Europe, sometimes even to America. This was to ensure that they arrived in these distant lands in peak condition and were completely yellow and well-rounded.

It was all too good to last! I don't want to talk about sad times, but things started to become difficult during the 19th century. With the arrival of tourism in the second half of the century when Menton became French-owned, the beautiful gardens where my ancestors were born were slowly replaced, season after season, by rich villas and gorgeous hotels. Of course, Lemons were still everywhere – on tourist posters for the Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée railway, on the artistic pieces created by the great Menton ceramists, on the tables of overwintering visitors, etc. But, the golden era had come to an end. The terrible winter of 1956 sounded the final death knell for my family's fortunes. The ups and downs of the Lemon family, or the Menton Lemon version of the novel 'The Leopard'!

I am, however, a natural optimist! I do belong, after all, to a family whose high levels of vitamin C result in lots of energy. So, for several years now, I have been fighting alongside a band of enthusiasts for the Menton Lemon to be revived and to make its rich history, which I have just quickly outlined, more well-known.


How can you recognise a genuine Menton Lemon ?

Although there are as many different varieties of lemons as there are places to grow them, not all are the same. They can be distinguished from each other according to several criteria, including shape, thickness of the skin, colour, aroma, acidity, etc. Only eight varieties of lemon in Europe have the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) accreditation.

The Menton Lemon originates from the Citrus Limon species, which includes the Adamo, Cerza, Eureka and Santa Térésa varieties. The 'Menton' variety differs from its Spanish and Italian cousins in its elliptical shape and its colour, which varies with the time of year. To start off with, the lemons are a light yellow, or even a light greenish colour. When they reach maturity, they become a nearly luminous yellow – giving them their name of 'the golden fruit'. Their fine-grained

skin is very fragrant and releases aromatic essences, marked by a strong aroma of fresh lemon balm. The clear, yellow-tinted juice has an intense aroma and is mildly acidic, without being sour.

These characteristics of the Menton Lemon are due to the way in which it is grown and the exceptional climate in the Menton region. The proximity of the Mediterranean sea and the naturally protective amphitheatre offered by the surrounding mountains creates a land with a microclimate in which citrus fruit can flourish. The range of mountains to the north protect the lemon trees from wind damage, particularly when they are laden with fruit. The hillsides around Menton have a sandstone bedrock with an almost neutral pH, also adding to the beneficial properties of the Menton



Lemon. The tangy taste of the fruit, with no trace of bitterness, is enhanced by the humidity of the atmosphere (which is similar to that found in a tropical climate), the mild, salty sea breezes and the moderate difference in temperature between day and night all play their part in limiting the build-up of sugar in the lemons. The relatively cold temperatures which occur in Menton between mid January and the start of February also are important for the fruit's rich colour, quality of taste and storage. Nurtured by short periods of rain, preserved by mists during the hottest periods of the summer and enjoying significant sunshine throughout the year, the Menton Lemon is not just a miracle of nature, but also an exceptional fruit, extremely popular with the top Michelin-starred chefs, including Joël Garaut, Honorary President of the Association for the promotion of the Menton Lemon (APCM). The future is looking bright thanks to the award of a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) accreditation in 2015.

Did you know ?

The boundaries of the geographical area of the Menton Lemon have taken into account the historical location of lemon trees, the old orchards to be renovated and the restorations that are favourable to its revival.

Now
we
have
the

PGI

everything
can get started!

'Menton will be surrounded by lemon trees once again. 'This is how Jean-Claude Guibal, the Deputy Mayor of Menton envisage the town in about twenty years' time. Although the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) accreditation is the result of a long process of recognition, the story of the Menton Lemon in modern times has only just begun.

The PGI that the Menton Lemon benefits from is based on strict specifications developed by the Association for the promotion of the Menton Lemon (APCM) with the support of the National Institute of Origin and Quality (INAO). In order to gain the right to use the accreditation, which is a guarantee of reliability and quality, every producer will have to comply with these specifications and respect the specific cultivation practices involved (size of the trees, density of the fruit, maintenance and irrigation of the plots, sustainable fertilisation and certification of plants).

Although the regulations are very great

Did you know?

Lemons are also grown in the town itself in the grounds of Casetta à Garavan and the garden of the Palais de Carnolès.

in number, they are necessary to standardise production and promote the golden fruit. Up until now, production has been 150 to 200 tonnes a year, with an anticipated boom in demand in years to come.

This is why the APCM, with the backing of the communes, is encouraging landowners to replant lemon trees using subsidies or upgrading the plots. An accurate survey has been carried for several years already.

Even though there are many restrictions, the Association is there to help anyone who wants to get involved – be they experts or just individuals! This is illustrated by the Esatitude centre in Menton, which employs adults with disabilities to look after an orchard of 200 lemon trees.

Alongside the revival in production – due to be continued in Menton's next Local Urban Planning scheme (PLU), with Jean-Claude Guibal announcing that 'Non building land suitable for agriculture will be dedicated to responsible farming with a sense of identity' – a promotional campaign has been prepared for several months now. In order to make the most of the Menton Lemon's PGI accreditation, the town centre, concerned largely with the use of its name, is planning a marketing campaign that will be equal to the golden fruit's new international reputation.